Because the fundamental philosophies and strategies regarding PLCs are familiar to and understood (in a very rudimentary sense) by all staff members at SSHS, we realize that, as a small school, we have some problems. Most of these problems stem from the fact that being a small school (117 students), we find it challenging to adopt the common assessment framework that is important to PLCs because there is only one teacher of English, one teacher of science, one teacher of special education, etc. Since the “focus on learning” questions are centered on common assessments (What do we want our students to learn? How will we know when they’ve learned? What will we do when students do not learn? What do we do when they know it?), we are struggling to understand how to adapt this framework since we have no same course/subject teachers.

I feel certain that the benefits associated with collaboratively focusing on student learning are worth doing, so my action plan is focused on “learning by doing.” We will form content teams similar to other schools—however, these teams will consist of *combinations* of English, math, social studies, science, fine arts/life skills/technology, and foreign language teachers. Even though the teachers on these teams all teach many singleton courses, they can develop common **essential outcomes** for their classes. The essential outcomes will focus on the common skills, shared between *similar* subject areas, that students are expected to learn. For example, the social studies/English team might develop essential outcomes like: “Students will read and interpret text by inferring, predicting, drawing conclusions, and formulating questions” and “Students will be able to relate, in writing, situations in the past to situations today.”

These common skills, based on essential outcomes, will enable teachers to design assessments that address students’ varying levels of proficiency, regardless of the course. In English/social studies classes, for example, a common assessment may focus on argument writing, a skill that all members of both departments feel is important. Rather than being a content-based assessment that evaluates students’ progress in a specific course, the common assessment can measure students’ writing/analytical thinking progress. This focus will enable the English/social studies team to engage in the shared conversation that occurs as a result of the common assessment approach—asking questions like, “What are we going to do with our struggling writers? Why did the students in this class outperform all of the others? What strategies did my colleague use to promote student success on the assessment? How can we stretch the students who have already demonstrated proficiency?”

With such a small staff, it is not possible to have true collaboration among all of the teachers (since there’s only one of each), so we will need to find the least common denominator among different subject areas and courses. Once this least common denominator is found, we can understand what we have in common and can then collaborate about learning in meaningful ways. More specific ideas are included in the attached powerpoint.

(Much of this material and the ideas presented are from meetings conducted in my former school district in Michigan by Anthony Muhammad from Solution Tree. I was also fortunate to be able to visit Adlai Stevenson High School in Lincolnshire, IL and Schaumberg District #54 in Schaumberg, IL where many of these ideas had already been put into action.

The Powerpoint is a work in progress. As far as collaborating electronically, the SSHS staff has not had the district presentation on using Twitter and the Wikki, so that may be a subject for a different day. However, making use of our electronic potential will serve to encourage collaboration between teachers in the same subject area, perhaps filling a need that collaborating with teachers in *similar* subject areas does not do).

### Adapted from [The PLC Framework for Small Schools](http://www.allthingsplc.info/wordpress/?p=977). October, 2010. Solution Tree.